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ABSTRACT

A study surveyed the use of computer hardware and software in reading and language arts programs of public and private elementary schools in Florida. Respondents, 173 public and private schools from urban, suburban, and rural areas of Florida (out of an initial group of 333), furnished information on who was providing computer instruction, where the instruction was occurring, what software was used, what kinds of computers were used, what kinds of funding supported the instruction, whether inservice training was available, and what evaluation procedures were used for the hardware and software. Results indicated that: (1) Apple computers are the most prevalent; (2) budgets for software remain small and not a budget line item; (3) classroom teachers and aides have the primary responsibility for computer instruction; (4) the majority of software is non-basal; (5) inservice training for computer literacy and evaluation of software is very limited; and (6) students spend an average of 30 minutes per week on a computer. Implications of this survey are that more time should be spent on instruction, that inservice training should be required, and that hardware and software should be evaluated by a team of evaluators. (RS)

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A Survey of Reading and Language Arts Software Used in Florida: Results and Educational Implications

ABSTRACT

This research project funded by Florida State University was designed to ascertain the use of computer software and hardware in reading and language arts programs in elementary schools in Florida. A survey was developed and sent to public and private schools throughout the sixty-seven counties of Florida. The survey results indicate: (1) the Apple computer is the predominant computer used in Florida schools (2) budgets for computer software remain small and not a budget line item (3) classroom teachers and aides have the primary responsibility for computer instruction (4) the majority of the software used in non-basal specific and usually single disk (5) inservice training for computer literacy and evaluation of software is very limited and (6) students spend an average of 30 minutes per week on a computer.

A Survey of Reading and Language Arts Software Used in Florida: Results and Educational Implications

INTRODUCTION

The integration of computers into the academic curriculum has been heralded by educators, computer vendors and legislators as the direction to go in seeking innovative instructional strategies. This technology has the potential for meeting the academic needs of the gifted as well as the at-risk students. However, it appears that neither the school personnel nor the students were prepared to take advantage of this unique opportunity to assimilate this technology into the school curriculum.

Recently, there has been a phethora of computer surveys at the national and state levels. In Florida, an initiative to assess the role of computers in public schools was undertaken by The Division of Public Schools of the Department of Education. Since the Florida legislature had recently appropriated $630,000.00 to acquire software programs at the lowest price possible, a survey was developed and sent to all school districts requesting a list of top subject area priorities when purchasing computer software. There were five priority areas listed for software titles within the categories of elementary, middle and high school levels. The results of the survey indicated the highest demand at the elementary level with language arts designated as the priority content area.

Based on these survey results, the Department of Education wrote a Request For Proposals (RFP) and seventeen companies responded. This process resulted in a word processing program appropriate for grades K-8 being selected for statewide adoption and distribution. School districts will receive copies of this program and inservice training based on the student population ratio in the elementary and middle grades. This process for selecting new software for statewide adoption will continue each year.

FLORIDA SURVEY: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To determine the status of computer usage in Florida schools, we developed a survey which was sent to selected public and private elementary schools. We were interested in determining the extent to which computers have impacted the reading and language arts curriculum at the elementary level in the State of Florida. The purpose of this research project was three fold: (1) to determine how many schools have incorporated microcomputer software into their reading and language arts programs (2) to ascertain where the computer instruction is occurring i.e. classrooms, media centers or computer labs and who is providing this type of instruction and (3) to gain information regarding the selection and evaluation process used by schools when

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purchasing reading and language arts software. Thus, this project was designed to broaden and expand the knowledge of what is currently happening in the State of Florida regarding computer use in the content areas of Reading and Language Arts at the elementary level. A letter and survey were mailed to three hundred and thirty-three (333) schools. An overall response rate of fifty-two percent (52%) was achieved. Public school survey responses totaled seventy-nine percent (79%) while the private school responses totaled thirty-six percent (36%). Urban, suburban and rural areas were included in the responses received and schools in forty-six of the sixty-seven school districts responded to the survey. School administrators, teachers, computer and media specialists were targeted as respondents to the survey.

There were six major objectives identified for this research project: (1) to determine who was providing computer instruction for reading and the training and background of these individuals (2) to determine where computer instruction was occurring - classroom, media center or computer lab (3) to determine the software being used in reading and language arts programs (4) to determine what kind of computers were being used for instructional purposes in reading and language arts programs (5) to determine the

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funding being allocated for computer hardware, computer software and computer inservice training and (6) to determine the software evaluation and hardware selection process used by schools and/or school districts. Therefore, the survey was divided into six categories: (1) school data (2) personnel data (3) computer data (4) software data (5) selection and evaluation data and (6) inservice training data. Survey results were analyzed using these six major categories which reflected the objectives of this research project.

SURVEY RESULTS

I. School Data - Two hundred public schools and one hundred and thirty-three private schools received surveys. Public school survey responses totaled seventy-nine percent (79%) while private school responses totaled thirty-six percent (36%). Responses were received from urban, suburban and rural counties.

II. Personnel Data - Principals, assistant principals, computer specialists, classroom teachers and media specialists completed the survey. Their average on-the-job experience was fifteen years. III.

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Computer-Data - Of the forty-six school districts responding, Apple was the predominant computer (51% public, 59% private.) IBM was second (27% public and 18% private) and Tandy/Radio Shack came in third (11% public and 24% private). Most school districts reported no budget line item for computer hardware and software. The budget range was $500.00 to $1500.00 for those public schools with a computer budget. The private school range was higher; $500.00 - $9000.00. However, public school district budgets were enhanced with federal and state dollars. Computers in the schools average twenty-five to thirty-five per school. Most computers are housed in either a computer lab or a classroom setting. If they are housed in the media center it is usually in an adjacent room. Chapter I programs usually have separate computer labs with separate curriculum software guidelines for approved appropriate materials. Students in special programs often receive as much as one hour per week of instruction while students not in special programs usually receive only thirty minutes of instruction per week.

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According to our survey, classroom teachers are the primary providers of computer instruction in the schools (44% public, 15% private) with teacher aides ranking second (30% public only). In private schools computer specialists rank first as providers of computer instruction (public 10%, private 73%) with media specialists ranking second (public 16%, private 20%).

IV. Software Data - Approximately eighty percent (80%) of the reading and language arts software used in Florida elementary schools is non-basal reader specific. Approximately two (2%) of the schools surveyed are purchasing only single disk/single skills programs.

V. Selection and Evaluation Data - Media specialists, classroom teachers, curriculum specialists, computer specialists, reading specialists and special program facilitators are the personnel responsible for software purchases and software evaluation procedures. Students, aides and subject area committees are frequently involved in the evaluation process. Some purchases are made through statewide buy programs or by licensing agreements such as MECC programs.

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VI. Inservice Training Data - In Florida, consultants working for Teacher Education Centers (TEC), curriculum specialists, hardware and software vendors as well as other educational consultants provide training in computer instruction. Seven public and three private schools responding to the survey require at least 10 hours of inservice training. According to the survey results, teachers often attend summer computer institutes held at a nearby university.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

In order for computers to be incorporated into educational programs, the personnel involved must be trained to implement this technology. Inservice training is a must. While many states have allocated funds for computer hardware and software purchases, only limited funds have been allocated to train teaching personnel how to efficiently use computers as an integrated part of the academic curriculum.

Our study showed that a small percentage of schools do require at least 10 hours of inservice training but many school districts did not require inservice training or university courses. It is highly recommended that all school curriculum personnel and classroom teachers have at

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least 10 hours of inservice training and/or a three hour university course. This training should include the operation of a computer, review and evaluation of software in major subject areas and most of all how to incorporate this software into daily lesson plans.

The selection and evaluation of hardware and software should be accomplished through an evaluation team. This team should consist of classroom teachers, school administrators, subject area curriculum specialists and preferably a student "tryout" class. Each school system should create a standard evaluation form for hardware and software. Such forms provide continuity throughout a system even when personnel change.

More time should be spent on computer instruction. The current average of 30 minutes per week at the elementary level is far from adequate. Additional time is needed for students to enhance their writing skills using a word processor as well as improving their reading skills through computer assisted instruction. The reading and writing connection helps provide continuity throughout reading and language arts programs.

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SUMMARY

This study surveyed public and private elementary schools in Florida to determine what computer hardware and software are currently being used in reading and language arts programs. The Apple Computer continues to be the predominant computer used in schools both nationally and in Florida. Budgets continue to be varied and often not a line item. It is the classroom teachers and aides who are providing most of the computer instruction with very little inservice training required. Finally, in the areas of Reading and Language Arts most of the software is non-basal specific and often is single disk/single skill specific. Certainly, education has a long way to go before it can reap the full benefits of this technology.

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Instructional Strategies Enhancement Computer Software Survey. (1987). Florida Department of Education, Division of Public Schools.

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